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# Media Studies and the Dialogue of Democracy

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## *Media Studies and the Dialogue of Democracy*

*John J. Pauly*

Though dialogic approaches have widely influenced the study of communication, they have left a fainter mark on studies of the mass media. I propose to investigate the reasons for this neglect. The indifference, truth be told, has flowed in both directions. For much of the 20th century, media scholars focused on matters of institutional structure, regulation, policy, economics, law, ideology, and effect. These traditions of research implicitly positioned dialogue as an epiphenomenon, a soft social process less constraining, explanatory, or decisive than the hard architecture of political economy, social structure, and cognitive disposition. Dialogue studies, for their part, have often treated the mass media as an iconic Other, the very embodiment of the impersonal social relations that undermine mutuality. The media, in their noisy ubiquity, have been imagined to crowd out and devalue the truly human.

The cultural turn of the last 20 years has opened a different moment, however, in which media and dialogue scholars might make common cause. The critical versions of media studies continue to insist that powerful structures restrain and determine our forms of communication (and a troubled world offers up ample evidence for their gloomy predictions). But hope finds voice, too. Scholars in both traditions seek reasons to imagine more fluidly responsive, decent, just, and participatory modes of human action. And the two have come to recognize shared assumptions. Both believe, after all, that humans "word" the world together, that our sense of self is emergent and contingent, and that our persistent, existential struggle, as creatures, is simply to make sense.

My chapter traces this trajectory of indifference and rapprochement. I want to explain why media and dialogue studies for so long neglected each

other, and why, today, they increasingly find themselves in each other's company. I use my own work in journalism studies to illustrate the process by which media scholars have reframed older questions in ways that dialogue scholars might find resonant. In particular, I reference the ongoing debate over public journalism as an example of how media studies has incorporated insights familiar to dialogue scholars. And I close with ideas about how dialogue scholars might treat the media as a legitimate object of study—that is, as something more than an emblem of their discontent.

## **Dialogue and the Problems of Scale**

Before I explore what has kept dialogue and media studies apart, let me debunk the stereotype that we sometimes imagine divides the two, so that we might consider other realms of difference. If we ask, "What is it about the media that discourages dialogue?" the conventional answer might be "Everything." Dialogue values face-to-face communication and cultivates one-on-one encounters, even when conducted in groups. The media feel like one-to-many; the message goes out to the audience members as a group, but they do not talk with one another. Dialogue is direct, a person-to-person encounter. The media are, well, mediated; they rely on technology rather than interpersonal commitment as their mode of connection. Dialogue values depth in the relations it fosters. The media settle for shallowness; they measure their own success in size and wealth of the audience gathered rather than personal transformation achieved.

The scale of the media arouses special concern. How does one encourage mutuality, active listening, and responsiveness among newspaper, magazine, radio, movie, and television audiences that range from the thousands to the tens of millions? Scholars have often judged such gatherings as incapable of producing dialogue (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Ellul, 1985; Kaplan, 1994; Postman, 1985). This judgment resonates with a longstanding commonplace of American and European thought that interprets large-scale media as emblems of a mass society (Bramson, 1961). Older terms like *mass communication* may wither year by year, but the concept persists. Indeed, the phrase *the media* still denotes much the same set of social practices as *mass* once did. When they talk about "the media," most Americans mean massive, heavily capitalized, technologically sophisticated, professionally managed, star-driven systems of communication. They think of the company newsletter, parish bulletin, video yearbook, pizza delivery flyer, yellow pages, personal website, wedding DJ, or small scholarly journal as something else—as means of communication, but not media. Even when we apply the term *alternative media* to smaller systems that audiences invest with special significance,

we imagine them as an alternative to the extensive technologies, permanent organizations, market relations, and professional expertise of "the media."

Do the terms *media* and *dialogue* mark incommensurable modes of communication? Perhaps they simply respond to different scholarly questions. For example, technology plays a more obvious role in media studies. Scholars attend closely to the making of such products as news stories, television programs, movie soundtracks, and magazine advertisements. Dialogue requires little technology, but it does depend upon cognate forms of social organization that Lewis Mumford (1952) used to call *technics*—the ordering practices that bind groups with art, language, ritual, and work, even in the absence of machines. Scholars often take for granted the technics of dialogue. In public deliberation projects, for example, the expertise of white-collar professionals has created the occasion, format, and ground rules for dialogue. Before participants speak one word, others have spent weeks or months setting the stage for their conversations. Projects such as the National Issues Forums (Mathews, 1994; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, pp. 169–180) employ expert moderators; planners who use phone, Internet, and fax to arrange housing, travel, and food; and scholars and journalists who write and assemble the preliminary materials. The forums, in other words, capitalize the speech of ordinary citizens in the same ways that universities routinely capitalize the speech of their professors. Further, such forums regulate the style of talk (especially if participants prove too performative or agonistic), and they train moderators to forestall eruptions of incivility.

Thus it seems improbable, to me at least, to think of dialogue as a pure, natural, uncorrupted realm that we enter once we shed the artifice of the media. Dialogue is every bit as "made" as any technology. Any attempt to divide technology from technics, to place the machine on one side and the human on the other, misses how we actually live. Nor can we easily discover, in modern societies, a domain of autonomous, genuinely personal experience that stands apart from our involvement with media. Participants come to dialogue with sensibilities and knowledge shaped by their use of mass-produced books, movies, and magazines as well as by ever-more years of formal education. The fact that participants *talk about* their experience as uniquely and authentically personal does not diminish this point. Manufactured knowledge and experience now speaks through all of us.

That is our dilemma, as creatures. We live in a world of widely circulated, objectified symbolic forms whose very existence testifies to their weight and importance. We wonder about our place in that world, suspecting that it makes us more than we make it. Our problem is not merely epistemological—a philosopher's debate about what we know and how—but painfully spiritual, for our sense of ethics depends upon retaining some sense of moral agency. My own conception of dialogue emerges from just such dilemmas of modern

experience. I think of dialogue as a fine word for humans' deep, persistent, and self-reflexive attempts to come to terms with the world and one another. Scholars' descriptions of dialogue—as immediacy of presence, mutual implication, vulnerability, genuineness (Cissna & Anderson, 1994a, pp. 13–15)—emphasize that our very humanness is at stake. Whether we believe in a god or dogma matters not; neither theism nor atheism gets us off the hook. The best we do is talk our way through uncertainty and chaos.

I study the mass media because, improbably enough, they offer themselves as an apt object with which to contemplate modernity and its paradoxes (Jensen, 1990). In their form as well as their content, media render the social order visible and public, as cultural studies so often suggest. They also offer us moral dramaturgy—forms of symbolic action by which groups fashion themselves. This is a way of seeing the world that I learned from my teachers, James Carey and the late Al Kreiling, and that they learned, in large part, from pragmatist philosophers such as John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead; sociologists such as Charles Horton Cooley, Robert Park, and W. I. Thomas; and assorted eccentrics such as Lewis Mumford, Kenneth Burke, and Hugh Duncan. These intellectuals were among the first to understand that the radical uncertainty of modernity demands a dialogic response. When change puts group identity in play, individuals must renegotiate their relations with an ever wider array of disparate others. They turn to the mass media to discover new styles of identity, in the process finding new occasions for symbolic display and conflict.

Above all, thinkers in this tradition feared the eclipse of the public, democracy's privileged representation of its shared civic life. Mary Ryan (1997) has posed the issue succinctly:

Was it possible for so diverse a people, with such different beliefs and competing interests, to mold themselves into one public, even a harmonious circle of publics? Would the decentralized practices of democratic associations create pandemonium or a working coalition? Can a public composed of men and women separated by their different resources and flagrant inequities operate in a truly democratic manner? (p. 17)

American pragmatists, symbolic interactionists, and cultural critics believed that dialogic communication offered an answer. Carey (1997) finds a powerful example of their hopes for democracy in the work of John Dewey. For Dewey, Carey argues, "Communication was an ethical principle. Whatever inhibited communication, whatever inhibited the sharing, widening, expansion of experience was an obstacle to be overcome" (p. 31). Despite its limitations and anomalies, this faith in the power of human connectedness and civic life has animated my research, and constitutes my own deepest commitment to dialogue.

## The Dominant Traditions of Media Research

What ultimately divides dialogue and media are the contrasting intellectual traditions from which each has grown. Philosophy gave birth to dialogue studies; our converging interests in political theory, ethics, and hermeneutics have nurtured it; and our experience with professionally managed talking therapies have lent it a familiar form. Media studies owes much more to history, law, and the social sciences. Discourse about the media has taken shape at different sites and moments. The field emerges not as a theory of language and thought, but as a running commentary on historically specific experiences of republican government, machine technology, free markets, immigration, leisure and entertainment, war, and social reform. In media studies, theory and practice often prove indistinguishable. Professional, academic, critic, and aficionado share the same podium. Media studies, as a field, offers a palimpsest of memory, law, canon, and custom on which every policy, narrative form, cultural conflict, and organization has left its mark. These discursive habits are particularly visible in three theoretical traditions that have shaped the field: liberal traditions of free expression, the political economy of media organizations, and the sociology of audiences.

Centuries-old debates over free expression have set the terms with which we continue to understand the significance of the mass media. Free speech, assembly, and press began as practical political accomplishments—attempts to wrest from crown and church the conditions of one's own making. The incompleteness of the liberal revolution—its slowness to recognize all the forms of humanness—does not dampen its reverberations. Unrestrained voice continues to serve as a universally recognizable signature of human freedom. (Does this story not animate our hopes for dialogue, too?) Jürgen Habermas (1989) has famously theorized this history as an invitation to a public sphere, an imagined civil order governed by uncoerced discourse, reason, and law. The new forms of political organization—citizenship and parliaments and parties and constitutions—made this moment palpable but did not exhaust its meaning. Implicit in the ideal of free expression was a new conception of social and moral identity—a sense that humans would no longer be considered fallen creatures, and society could be understood as the group life that humans choose rather than inherit (Unger, 1987). Even marginalized groups such as African Americans have turned to print and publication to fix their place in history and compel others to recognize their presence (Gates, 1990).

I have told the story this way to emphasize the moral dramaturgy associated with free speech. Unrestrained voice intoxicates us with the possibilities of human liberation. Not surprising, then, that the media have worked so hard to forge themselves into emblems of that freedom and guardians of its traditions.

The exercise of free speech and press has proved so incendiary that it has often incited violence, including mobbing of editors, duels, destruction of newspaper offices, press sabotage, and the assassination of reporters (Nerone, 1994). Today, the media invoke the rhetoric of freedom to describe their every adaptation to changing markets and mores. Thus we commonly hear that the press is the only business specifically protected by the constitution (because its freedom matters so much to us), that television viewers freely choose which programs to watch, that objective reporting encourages a free flow of ideas, and that the public interest is served best when media corporations are left to compete with one another in a free market. In each case, media organizations trade on the rhetoric of freedom, whether or not their behavior actually encourages human liberation.

The second literature I wish to reference, on media economics and organizational structure, considers the material conditions of human symbol-making, describing all the ways that modern societies industrialize, bureaucratize, and capitalize their cultural practices. The earliest accounts of media organizations grew out of political economy and the study of law and regulation. Such institutional approaches often interpreted media systems as the lengthened shadow of a nation's political ideology. For instance, the widely influential *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956) categorized each nation's press system by its commitment to authoritarian, classical liberal, or social responsibility principles. As commentators have noted (Nerone, 1995), *Four Theories* too easily fit its conceptual categories to the political commonplaces of the Cold War. Nonetheless, this approach governed studies of the international press and broadcasting for many years, and critical theories of media still assume that ideological and market forces ultimately determine media performance.

Like the free expression tradition, scholarship on media organizations works with historically specific referents. In the 19th century, for example, the United States and Europe steadily diverged in their organization of telegraph and telephone systems, after starting with similar postal systems. In Europe, the national post offices absorbed the telegraph and telephone into their state monopolies, in part to guarantee access for military purposes. The United States forthrightly committed itself to an expensive, universal, federal postal system as an indispensable infrastructure of republican government (John, 1995; Kielbowicz, 1989). But in 1844, Congress refused Samuel Morse's offer to sell his telegraph patents to the American government (Thompson, 1947). The development of the telegraph as a private system would inflect Americans' approach to every subsequent electrical and electronic technology. The debate over each new invention—telephone, radio, sound recording, television, satellite—would rehearse similar choices. Today we ask whether privately owned portals and content providers should be allowed to structure public access to the

Internet, a system originally sponsored by agencies of the U.S. government. And Europeans ponder the consequences of allowing satellite television providers to compete with state-supported broadcasting systems.

I have noted that for many years scholars interpreted media organizations as the projection of a nation's political and economic beliefs. Since the 1970s, however, studies of media organizations have taken a different turn. Without fully renouncing institutional approaches, scholars have studied media organizations as dynamic systems, responsive to external market pressures, of course, but also driven by internal routines, divisions of labor, technologies, and professional values. Production studies typically focus on the routine manufacture of media artifacts rather than the creation of artistically exceptional single works. They interpret each media product as a remnant left by the organization's practices, a trace of the bureaucratic negotiations that produced it. This approach allows greater weight to professional values, noting their intersection with organizational roles, routines, budgets, and production practices. One can find dozens of examples of this approach applied to journalism alone (e.g., Darnton, 1990; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Schudson, 2003; Soloski, 1997; Tuchman, 1978). But one also finds similar studies of music (Faulkner, 1971; Peterson, 1997), television entertainment (Cantor, 1971; Elliott, 1972; Gitlin, 1983), movies (Powdermaker, 1950), magazines (Lutz & Collins, 1993), advertising (Arlen, 1980; Hirota, 1988), and public relations (Jackall, 1988).

Dialogic theory offers little that resembles this literature on political economy and organizational bureaucracy. In a sense, dialogue hopes to escape the sociological by emphasizing the emergent and wondrous over than the normal and routine. That is also why scholars committed to political economy or production approaches may find dialogic models unconvincing. The problem is not so much that dialogue studies are indifferent to questions of power—a charge recently addressed by Hammond, Anderson, and Cissna (2003). Intellectual sensibility, and self-styling, divide the traditions. Scholars who study media organizations believe that claims about economics and organizational structure always dwarf other forms of explanation. Political economy, in particular, prides itself on maintaining a tone of *realpolitik*. In the work of scholars such as Robert McChesney (1993, 1999; McChesney & Nichols, 2002), Nicholas Garnham (1990, 2000), or Noam Chomsky (2002; Herman & Chomsky, 1988), economics and ideology always count for more than culture, interaction, narrative, interpretation, or dialogue.

From the perspective of dialogue studies, this must seem a domineering conception of the real. It identifies power as the key issue—perhaps the only real issue—that media scholarship should address. Political economy declares life's material demands as inescapable, and its existential demands as evanescent. When scholars do examine the talk that occurs within media organizations,

they typically study it instrumentally, as a behavior that helps the organization perform its tasks. The dozens of newsroom studies, for example, rarely treat journalists' discourse as self-reflective or ethical (e.g., Bowers, 1998). The working assumption of production studies, true enough, is that media work is hectic and stressful. Participants meet their deadlines only by relying upon standard routines, quick decisions, and taken-for-granted conceptual categories. But ultimately media professionals talk in order to complete their tasks, rather than to discover something about themselves or others.

It is in the third literature, audience studies, that media scholars discover reasons to consider a more dialogic approach. Since the early 20th century, social scientists have been interested in audiences—who they are (both demographically and existentially), what they read and watch, how they use media, how they learn. Commercial media have found it advantageous to answer such questions to measure and package their audiences for advertisers (Converse, 1987). One gets a rough sense of the audience literature by putting its keywords—effects, information, and culture—in historical progression (Carey, 1989, pp. 37–68). From the 1920s to the 1950s, behavioral studies of media effects on attitude, opinion, and behavior dominated. In the 1950s and 1960s researchers began employing cognitive approaches to study learning, framing, and agenda-setting. By the 1970s cultural approaches emerged to account for the media as forms of sense-making. All three approaches continue to coexist today, capitalized and encouraged by different professional and academic constituencies.

Despite their obvious and much-studied differences, each of these paradigms hopes to understand the relation of content and audience. Behaviorists treat content as the stimulus that produces an audience response; cognitivists, as a conceptual frame that reorganizes the audience's mental schema; and culturalists, as a symbolic world that invites play and identification or, in critical versions, sutures the audience to ideology. In each case, media content leads to something. It influences consumer buying, changes our vote, makes a lifestyle attractive, frames our conception of political issues, establishes our common sense about the world, or offers narratives that render experience intelligible. Cultural studies has a special stake in such work, for content offers the audience symbolic models of reality. In content, cultural studies discovers stories about how we live, including any number of dark tales of juvenile delinquency, sexual crossings, ethnic conflict, consumer ecstasy, violence, and propaganda.

I do not intend to survey the sprawling landscape we have come to call cultural studies, or to track its numberless progeny. Let me briefly note, however, two related areas of media studies, not so easily categorized, where one finds strong dialogic influences. One school, following the lead of Marshall McLuhan (1951, 1962, 1964) and Walter Ong (1967, 1977, 1982), has come to be known as "medium theory" or "media ecology." It explores the ways

in which different media physiologically and psychologically engage their audiences (e.g., Gozzi, 1999; Meyrowitz, 1985; Postman, 1985, 1992; Strate, Jacobson, & Gibson, 1996). Another school, even more loosely assembled, uses contemporary literary criticism to describe the audience's co-construction of media texts. Television scholar Horace Newcomb (1984) was one of the first to use Bakhtin and Volosinov to describe how media texts engage audiences. The work of John Fiske (1987, 1989a, 1989b) would similarly theorize the audience's interactive relation to television and other forms of popular culture. And in the 1990s scholars would apply postmodern perspectives to new electronic media (Poster, 1990, 2001), often searching for signs of community in cyberspace (Jones, 1995, 1997, 1998; Marcus, 1996; Smith & Kollock, 1999).

Media studies such as these have readily incorporated dialogic insights. But many media scholars also consider such work somewhat tangential to their concerns, unless it also engages questions of economics, history, law, and organizational structure. Nonetheless, cultural approaches, broadly considered, have fundamentally altered the field. Many media scholars now acknowledge the centrality of human symbol-making, treat reality as co-constructed and emergent, and recognize the multiplicity and fluidity of the self. Theoretical purists will still find reasons to disagree, of course. Cultural studies may protest that dialogic theory's invitation to escape sociological reality prevents us from confronting the institutional forces that constrain us. And dialogic theory might understandably weary of the cultural studies two-step: its habit of paying lip service to a theoretically fluid, socially constructed reality, but always discovering a determinative ideological order that disciplines the play of meaning.

## **Journalism and the Dialogue of Democracy**

I want to scout a small corner of media scholarship—journalism studies—where I have tried to blend the concerns of cultural studies and dialogic theory. My research has focused on the meaning and significance of journalism's talk about itself, its public, and the polity it serves. Over and over, the profession has metonymically reimagined its public, variously invoking it as audience, market, and community. Each attempt to name journalism's purpose casts public life in a different light. If we describe journalism as information, we are inviting citizens to consider newsreading a civic duty. If we believe that publicity is journalism's source of power, we expect reporters to expose the dark corners of public life to scrutiny. If we think of news as little more than gossip, we will expect little of it. However we conceptualize journalism, we are likely to fall back upon one or another cognate of dialogue. We may consider journalism a form of access, deliberation, or dialogue (Heikkilä & Kunelius, 2002), but it is all still talk.

My writings explore the meanings of our talk about journalism. For example, what do we learn about the profession's ethos by studying the way it demonizes outlaws like Rupert Murdoch (Pauly, 1988), or the public journalism advocates within its ranks (Pauly, 1999), or its lackadaisical readers (Pauly, 1991b)? How does the profession's talk about itself reveal the social commonplaces it holds dear (Pauly & Eckert, 2002)? How does a newspaper assess the difference it has made in the life of a community (Pauly, 2003b)? How have movements within the profession, such as the New Journalism (Pauly, 1990), compelled journalists to reconsider their relations with subjects, sources, and readers? And what have such movements signified to readers, student journalists, and disaffected professionals (Pauly, 1998a)? By what metaphors should we understand the profession's work and the social relations it forges? Is journalism an information utility? A form of storytelling answerable only to the narrative instincts of reporters? Or a moral spectacle? What does it mean when journalism talks about itself as an art form (Pauly, 2003a)? Or an undeveloped medium for social dialogue (Pauly, 1994)? What might we learn from exceptional writers, such as Jane Kramer, who have consistently imagined their work in different terms (Pauly, 1995, 1998b)? And how might the methods of cultural studies help us analyze what and how journalism has signified (Pauly, 1989, 1991a; Jensen & Pauly, 1997)?

The debate over public journalism aptly illustrates the possibilities and difficulties of applying dialogic concepts to media studies. The term *public* (or sometimes *civic*) *journalism* refers to a movement in the 1990s to reconnect news organizations, especially daily newspapers, to the communities they served. In cities like Wichita, Kansas; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Columbus, Georgia, journalists began experimenting with election coverage, but soon opened their pages to wider-ranging discussions of community life, crime, race relations, and city planning. These public journalism projects, as they came to be known, created new rituals of involvement such as community forums, focus groups, and neighborhood pizza parties. Looking back at this history, Rosen (1999, p. 262) has identified four key traits that he thought had characterized the movement: It addressed people as citizens rather than consumers, it helped them act upon not just learn about community problems, it took some measure of responsibility for public discourse, and it recognized that journalism must "help make public life go well" if it hoped to earn the attention and respect of citizens.

I would add one other trait. Public journalism prospered because it recognized that public discourse about press performance had changed. Professional and public dissatisfaction with coverage of the 1988 and 1992 elections provided the immediate impulse to change, but the steady, long-term decline in prestige and centrality of the daily newspaper also opened editors and reporters to ideas they had rejected in the past. The testimony of highly

regarded former reporters like Paul Taylor and Richard Harwood underscored the seriousness of the crisis. The movement found prominent and successful spokesmen in successful and respected small-city newspaper editors—most notably Davis “Buzz” Merritt, Jr., of the *Wichita Eagle* and Cole Campbell of the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* and later the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Their enthusiasm and friendship lent credibility to the work of Jay Rosen, a professor at New York University, who would spearhead the movement. Rosen drew heavily on a rich body of theoretical writings on journalism by James Carey, first of the University of Illinois and more recently at Columbia University. But Rosen also found imaginative ways to translate that literature for a professional audience, even when his elisions frustrated both professional (Corrigan, 1999) and academic critics (Glasser, 1999b). The movement garnered strong support from the Knight, Kettering, and Pew foundations, helping Rosen earn a hearing for his ideas at industry forums such as the Poynter Institute and the American Press Institute. Representatives of those institutions, such as David Mathews, Ed Fouhy, Jan Schaeffer, and Roy Peter Clark, found ways to hook public journalism to their groups’ agendas.

The scholarly response to public journalism demonstrates the ways in which media studies habitually resists dialogic approaches. The book created out of a 1996 Stanford University conference on “The Idea of Public Journalism” (Glasser, 1999b), features a number of hard-nosed critiques of the movement. Barbie Zelizer (1999) writes that she appreciates the idea of public journalism but thinks it has failed to connect itself to the larger professional community and its history. John Peters (1999a) argues that public journalism does not recognize that “dialogue is a form of communication whose form is organically connected to scale.” The dream of democracy as a “grand dialogue of all citizens,” he writes, is “flawed in compelling ways” (p. 104). Michael Schudson (1999) argues that the communal habits encouraged by public journalism are not adequate to public life, where citizens must “work out problems among people with few shared values, little trust, and a feel of anxiety and enmity” (p. 131). Following Nancy Fraser and Todd Gitlin’s criticisms of a unitary public sphere, Ted Glasser (1999a) faults public journalism’s quest to create a common discursive space in which all citizens might meet to discuss public affairs. All these criticisms, well-grounded and reasonable, position dialogue as an improbable and unworkable ideal, certainly as something less politically decisive than professional norms (Zelizer), historical precedent (Peters), institutional structure and procedural rules (Schudson), or group interests (Glasser).

This battle over public journalism matters because it broaches larger political questions. From a dialogic perspective, we might ask what we should call “the between” in a nation of citizens? A stage for the performance of group interests? A forum for policy discussion and ideological dispute? A market for the exchange of information? A meeting that makes the town visible to itself as

a political entity? Schudson (1997) has noted the ubiquity of one particular metaphor—conversation—in the work of many contemporary thinkers, from Habermas to Bruce Ackerman, Richard Rorty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Michael Oakeshott. Recognizing that dialogue and conversation may not describe exactly the same activity, I want to compare Schudson's position with that of his most eloquent interlocutor, James Carey. I have chosen Schudson and Carey because of their prominence and influence in American media studies. They both frequently write about the role of journalism in democracy, and they regularly read and comment on each other's work. Most important, for my purposes, neither takes a purely dialogic stance. Theirs is not a pro-and-con argument, but rather a struggle to imagine how or why one might incorporate dialogue into our theories of democracy.

Schudson (1997) begins by distinguishing two types of conversation that he thinks we have conflated. Sociable conversation, he says, "has no end outside itself" (p. 299). It honors the pleasure of social interaction. Problem-solving conversation, he says, "finds the justification of talk in its practical relationship to the articulation of common ends" (p. 300). This second sort of conversation creates the space for public reasoning, deliberation, and persuasion. It is not an easy space to manage, as it turns out. The possibility of embarrassment keeps many from speaking out, even when given the chance (here he borrows from Jane Mansbridge's [1980] study of actual participation in New England town meetings). In homogeneous settings, shared values and a sense of trust may encourage speech. In heterogeneous settings—that is, exactly the sort found in modern democracies—the risks are higher and the rewards more uncertain. Schudson argues that only social and political norms, conventions, and resources that stand apart from conversation make democracy possible. To make conversation work, we must create "ground rules designed to encourage pertinent speaking, attentive listening, appropriate simplifications, and widely apportioned speaking rights" (p. 307). Deliberation also depends upon inscription—the power of print and broadcast materials to fix and disseminate a record.

Schudson's training as a sociologist shows in this argument, as does his early, and lately renewed, interest in political science. By his account, society operates more powerfully than culture, enabling and constraining members' performances. He considers conversation as one mode of democracy, but certainly not its essence. As in his book *The Good Citizen* (1998), he stresses the importance of social institutions embedded in particular histories, and this emphasis distinguishes him from scholars educated more exclusively in communication traditions. A few years ago I suggested to Schudson that, for all his work in media and communication, he seemed to be seeking something more than a purely communicative perspective. He agreed, saying that he wanted communication *and* something else. In the essay on conversation, his emphasis on sociological context leads him to conclude that sometimes the requirements of democracy

may trump those of conversation. The moment may come, he writes, when we need to call a strike or demonstrate or cease speaking or invite conflict, if only to affirm for others the depth of our convictions (Schudson, 1997).

One can read this argument on conversation as a reply to Habermas's (1989) conception of a public sphere. Schudson has spelled out his objections elsewhere, too—in his essay "Was There Ever a Public Sphere?" (Schudson, 1995, pp. 189–193) and in his recent book on the sociology of news (Schudson, 2003). But media scholars have interpreted the conversation essay as a friendly and spirited, if direct and deadly serious, challenge to Carey's writings about democracy and public life. Indeed, Schudson acknowledges that "In communication studies, James Carey has been especially eloquent in placing conversation at the center of public life and the restoration of a public at the heart of the contemporary task of democratic society" (Schudson, 1997, p. 298).

It is not so easy to summarize Carey's work, filled as it is with complexly nested arguments, subtle turns of phrase, and literary allusion. But Carey (1997) himself has provided the following summary in his second collection of essays:

Communication understood as a metaphor of ritual and conversation encourages, even requires, a primitive form of equality because conversation must leave room for response as a condition of its continuance. Conversation enforces a recognition of others in the fullness of their presence. In conversation we must deal with the full weight of words for they put not only our minds but also our bodies in play and at risk. Therefore, to speak conversationally is not only to invite *and* require a response, but to temper of necessity our criticisms and alienations, our objections and differences, with expressions, implicit and explicit of solidarity and mutual regard. (p. 315)

Carey believes that journalism necessarily plays a special role in any free society—a role bequeathed to it by historical circumstance and custom. "Journalism is central to our politics," he writes, "to the power of the state, to our capacity to form livable communities, indeed to our survivability as a democratic community" (p. 330). The purpose of public journalism, he writes, is "nothing less than the re-creation of a participant, speaking public, ritually formed for democratic purposes, brought to life via conversation between citizen journalists and journalist citizens" (p. 338).

Stated so broadly, Carey's concepts of conversation, public, and journalism may seem vulnerable to Schudson's theoretical objections and historical evidence. But Carey insists that he means to identify the communicative practices by which individuals and societies have imagined the *possibilities* of human freedom. He and Schudson tend to choose different representative anecdotes. Schudson stresses the persistence of social structure, custom, and routine, and the historically specific ways in which new structures, customs, and routines emerge. Carey emphasizes moments of disruption and rebirth.

Thus he discovers inklings of public life in the debates over the United States constitution, in the *samizdat* (i.e., clandestine literature) and coded fictions of Eastern Europeans, in John Dewey's response to Walter Lippmann, and, as noted above, in public journalism. In the spirit of Dewey and the Canadian economist Harold Adams Innis, Carey understands conversation as the oral tradition's stand against military adventurism, imperial technology, arrogant professionalism, and unencumbered markets. And he values the pedestrian everydayness of that tradition. Like Mumford, whose work he read closely in the 1960s and 70s, he considers the city a humanly made container that lends shape and resonance to public life. This, I suspect, is one of the things he admires about public journalism: its plain commitment to making cities work.

It is worth noting that neither Schudson nor Carey foregrounds dialogic theory. Carey's defense of conversation, quoted above, certainly acknowledges the importance of mutuality and positive regard. And yet one feels in Carey's position the strong hand of the free expression tradition. What he describes as conversation can seem like alternating speaking performances, tempered by friendship and civility. He almost never draws upon relational or interpersonal thinkers, preferring to keep company with historians, legal scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists. And despite his commitment to hope, possibility, and choice, he readily acknowledges the weight of history. Schudson's perspective seems, at first glance, unfriendly to dialogic theory. Within his liberal worldview, rules, procedures, and structures matter more than communicative form. As a writer, he comes across as more argumentative and less playful, less willing to entertain whimsical or expressive meanings. He loves to debunk commonplaces. Nonetheless, his writings contain charming moments of personal revelation. In the conversation essay, for example, he argues that "the romance of conversation" does not acknowledge that many people (himself included) are slow to speak and do not enjoy deliberative discourse or large gatherings. And in his fine book on the history of citizenship, which defends a limited, monitorial conception of citizenship against communitarian calls for more political participation, he opens with a description of himself as an election volunteer at his local polling place in California.

Many media scholars operate with similarly mixed commitments and purposes, making it unlikely that dialogic theory will ever displace the dominant traditions of media research. But might dialogue play a larger role than it has in our discussions of the media? Let me briefly note four areas where media studies would profit from closer relations with dialogic theory.

First, the question of how the media represent the forms of human talk remains relatively unexplored. Do the media promote or hinder dialogue by the way they represent our processes of conversation, argument, and discourse? Our cinematic images of human talk, for example, model an apparent preference for the impassioned speech, the burble of young love, the gossip of the high school

cafeteria, and the argument that explodes into a fight. How should a society committed to dialogue use popular culture to represent its forms of talk?

Second, dialogic theory might usefully counterbalance the powerful bureaucratic routines and professional norms that govern media production. Public journalism has demonstrated that media professionals begin to think differently about their work when steadily confronted with the perspectives of citizens who stand outside their work routines. Might media organizations consciously create more occasions for dialogue—times and places set aside for nonroutine talk? Are media professionals capable of suspending their professional habits long enough to probe more deeply the social and political implications of their work?

Third, dialogic theory offers an alternative conception of who human beings are. Without insisting on a priori normative beliefs, it entertains the possibility of creaturely solidarity. In this it differs from the oversocialized conception of human nature found in the social sciences. Media studies, especially in its critical modes, too easily codes and categorizes individuals in terms of social structure, group standpoint, and presumed position in hierarchies of power. Dialogue hopes for a more fluid, less structured space for human interaction. It imagines vulnerability and openness as virtues, a sign of our shared existential condition.

Finally, dialogic theory offers perhaps our best grounding for the study of media ethics. Cliff Christians (1977, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2000; Christians, Ferré, & Fackler, 1993; De Lima & Christians, 1979) has read and published extensively in this vein, pursuing insights from a wide range of social philosophers, including Jacques Ellul, Martin Buber, Charles Taylor, Paulo Freire, and Ivan Illich. His work, steadily deepened over the past 20 years, has had a profound influence on scholarship in media ethics. From such seeds new work has sprung, such as James Ettema and Theodore Glasser's (1998) exemplary study of investigative journalists, which combines ethics and organizational analysis. Work on practical and applied ethics by mainstream philosophers has been moving in this same direction (e.g., May, 1996), foregrounding communication practices and identifying responsiveness to others as the indispensable requirement of ethical behavior.

A commitment to dialogue promises practical as well as theoretical consequences. Consider, one last time, the state of American journalism. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (2002) solicited and published essays on press performance by an array of scholars, including Rosen, Carey, and Schudson. Wisely and perceptively, the authors describe how the profession responded to the crisis, often with renewed enthusiasm and sense of purpose. And yet I saw and heard something different. On that blindingly clear fall day, journalism hesitated in the face of terror and trauma, uncertain of what to do or say, even as armies of reporters and editors

were gearing up for lavish, heroic feats of reportage. Dave Eason (1990) has noticed a similar uncertainty in the work of New Journalists such as Joan Didion, Michael Herr, Hunter Thompson, and Norman Mailer. These reporters felt that the enormity of cultural change and political upheaval in the 1960s had outrun their ability to tell stories in the usual way. Might we consider journalists' narrative failure, in such circumstances, a form of radical honesty? Or even a democratic virtue?

Didion (2003) has recently noted the differences between the responses of citizens and the political establishment (including journalists) in the weeks after September 11. On a West Coast book tour that fall, Didion said her audiences "recognized that even then, within days after the planes hit, there was a good deal of opportunistic ground being seized under cover of the clearly urgent need for increased security." Washington, she wrote, "was still talking about the protection and perpetuation of its own interests." And her listeners' response? "These people got it. They didn't like it. They stood up in public and they talked about it" (p. 54). Under such dire circumstances, citizens turned immediately to talk. But were their institutions listening? All too quickly, reflection yielded to retribution. At such moments, dialogue hopes to call us to our better nature, as creatures, as simply human beings. Conceived as a dialogic institution (Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994), journalism might have opened and defended a space for dialogue, where citizens could reflect, speak, and be heard. Journalism could have imagined its charge differently—not to inform, but to do whatever it could to prevent us from forging our portraits of grief into declarations of war.